

THE MAN WITH THE UNWANTED TENANT
THE MAN WITH THE UNWANTED TENANT (MATTHEW 12:43-45)

It is interesting to note that when the writers of the Gospels wrote their memoirs, they only mentioned 27 occasions when people were individually healed by the Savior. Infrequently Jesus performed mass-miracles when He helped all the sufferers in His audience, but, apart from those events, the people healed were few. The 27 instances mentioned suggested Christ delivered fewer than nine every year, or less than one per month. This seems to be astonishing when modern faith-healers claim hundreds of miracles in every service. There must be an explanation for this surprising fact.

Luke described how ten lepers were healed in a moment, but nine went away to disappear into obscurity (Luke 17:12-18). Matthew tells of two demoniacs who were delivered at Gadara, but one was never seen again (Matt. 9:28). The same might be said of one of the two blind men who were given sight in Jericho (Matt. 20:30-34). Luke also mentioned a man who said to the Lord: "I will follow thee—but.. ."; apparently he never fulfilled his original vow.

Many people admired Christ, but avoided discipleship. Probably, they considered themselves incapable of emulating His example. Millions of people continue to say: "I would like to become a Christian, but could never live that life."

The Strange Dwelling... Divided

The Savior was an expert in the art of painting word-pictures, but His description of the haunted house was a masterpiece! When He described the strange conditions prevailing in a hypothetical home, His listeners were able to visualize the strange house in which lived an honest citizen and a demon. One end of the structure was attractive, clean and inviting; the other, filthy, neglected and forbidding. When seen through modern eyes, one half of the building was charmingly decorated, beautifully curtained; its appearance indicated loving and continuing pride. Yet the other was conspicuous for cobwebs and dirty windows. Peeling paint and rags had replaced draperies.

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Looking through the window was a demented creature who was determined never to vacate the premises. The householder detested the unwanted neighbor but was too weak to enforce an eviction.

Thus did the Savior describe a human soul in which sincerity longed for what appeared to be unobtainable freedom. That scene vividly described people who said: "We would love to become Christians, but unfortunately, there resides within us enemies we cannot control. If we followed Christ, we might dishonor His name."

The Startling Decision... Demonstrated

Then, unexpectedly, a miracle happened! A new determination filled the owner of the house, and with increasing courage, he entered the dirty section of the ruined home, and fiercely evicted the demon. Probably he surprised himself—he had accomplished the impossible!

The spring cleaning which followed beggared description. Untiring energy banished filth. New drapes were hung in the repaired windows, and the homestead became what it was meant to be. The songs of the householder echoed throughout the home; he had discovered a happiness thought to be beyond his reach. A new future awaited him; the terrible experience of living with a devil had become a memory; his dreams had

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come true!

Probably the Savior smiled at His captivated audience. The listeners knew Christ was expressing the conviction that God could deliver men from the power of evil. The idea was marvelous, but surely there was a flaw somewhere! They visualized the householder proudly surveying his reclaimed home, and appreciated the satisfaction shining on his face. Yet, their speculative eyes seemed to be asking: "Will the expelled demon return? Would this happiness be lasting or temporary?" The Lord read their thoughts, and proceeded with His message.

The Saddening Defeat... Disturbing

The Teacher said: "When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest, and findeth

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none. Then he saith, I will return into my house from whence I came out; and when he is come, he findeth it empty, swept, and garnished. . ." The Amplified Version translates the text: "Then he says: I will go back to my house from which I came out. And when he arrives, he finds the place unoccupied, swept, put in order, and decorated."

The inference in Christ's remarks was obvious, but it created a problem. The demon knew it would be unwise to return to his former home — alone! He had been expelled once; the householder would evict him again. Evidently help was needed. "Then goeth he, and taketh with himself seven other spirits, more wicked than himself, and they enter in and dwell there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first."

Modern people respond to that detail with an excuse saying: "That is precisely the reason why we do not embrace the doctrines of Christianity. Knowing our weaknesses, we hesitate to embark upon a new way of living lest we fail, and increasing shame would increase our frustration. It is better to tolerate one devil than to run the risk of living with eight!"

The Sublime Deliverer... Defending

Evidently, there was a flaw in the parable. The householder, having expelled his evil companion, made a mistake—he decided to live alone! When the evil spirit returned, he found the residence empty. The owner, pleased with his achievement, had left the place unguarded, and during his absence the undesirable tenant returned to make new plans.

No one can maintain a ceaseless watch; every man needs to sleep! The reason for the ensuing failure was that the house remained unguarded. If the householder had enjoyed the companionship of a guest with similar desires and ambitions, they could have shared the responsibility of protecting their house. However, the new friend would need the power to overcome devils.

This scripture can only be understood when considered in its context. Christ had already demonstrated His ability to expel demons. The evil spirits within the maniac from Gadara confessed they were legion; that is, they were six thousand in

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number, and any person capable of overcoming that kind of opposition would have no problem expelling eight enemies (Luke 8:30). Matthew described how a demoniac was delivered by Christ, and the reality of the miracle was never denied by the Pharisees. Accepting the fact, they tried to explain it by claiming Jesus collaborated with Beelzebub the chief of demons.

It would appear, therefore, that the secret of the household-

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er's triumph would have been an invitation to Christ to accept hospitality. The Lord could, and would, enable men to triumph in all circumstances of life. Paul expounded these truths throughout his epistles.

A. The Unclean House

The apostle wrote: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me" (Rom. 7:18-20). Paul and wickedness lived in the same house!

B. The Unprecedented Hope

To whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles; which is Christ in you the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27). That statement expressed the greatest truth in the Gospel message. It was, and still is, inconceivable to unbelievers that anyone who had died could still be alive and able to reside within his followers. Yet Paul insisted that Christ could be formed within redeemed souls, and by the power of the indwelling Spirit, He could enrich the lives of God's children. Christians should invite Him to share their dwelling, and gain victory over the evil which might already be there.

C. The Unending Companionship

Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengthen me" (Phil. 4:13). The Lord left His disciples so that in another form He could remain with them forever. Throughout

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His earthly ministry the Savior was restricted by physical limitations. He could not be in Jerusalem and Capernaum at the same moment! He said: "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you" (John 16:7).

Speaking of the Lord, Paul said: "And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee; for my strength is made perfect in weakness . . ." (2 Cor. 12:9). Christ not only cleanses the human temple; He enables the believer to maintain its purity.

During my stay in Australia, I met a remarkable man who had served several years in a prison. He told me that as far back as he could remember he had been a kleptomaniac. Even when he was a young boy he constantly felt an irrepressible urge to steal. His criminal deeds ruined his life. Then one day he became a Christian and everything changed. I listened to his testimony and saw intense gratitude shining in his eyes. When I asked, "Do you ever feel an urge to steal now?", he paused for several moments before replying: "Yes, Sir, there are times when the old urge comes over me like a flood. That feeling is terrible." I continued: "When that happens, what do you do?" As tears filled his eyes, he said: "Sir, I look to Jesus, and He holds me fast."

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